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The end(s) of cinema: cinema in the age of digital transformation

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CERTIFICATION

I, Graham P. Martin, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Masters By Research, in the School of Social Sciences Media and Communications, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Graham P. Martin

2 May 2006

The End(s) of Cinema: Cinema in the Age of Digital Transformation

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the degree

Masters By Research

from

University of Wollongong

by

Graham Martin BA (Hons)

School of Social Sciences Media and Communication

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the affects of digital technology on cinema. The particular question it addresses is whether there is a discrete object called digital cinema with a clearly defined set of formal practices and conventions. In answering this question a ‘television model’ was employed that determined the formation of a digital cinema to be the product of the interactions between cinema, television and digital technologies. In this sense digital cinema was not just a continuation of cinema by digital means. Most previous ways of examining digital cinema placed it in the same theoretical framework of modernity and modernism that had been used to explain cinema’s emergence in the late 19th century. These explanations mainly concentrated on the issue of producing permanently fixed images that the apparatus of cinema then brought to life in front of a paying audience. Digital cinema on the other hand responded to a different set of concerns. The idea of digital cinema was born out of the desire to distribute cinema images electronically in a similar way to cable television. Digital cinema therefore followed a more postmodern trajectory concerned with media distribution and exhibition as a form of spectacle or event. This is best explained through the discourses of televisuality, telepresencing, simultaneity and the kind of manipulability enabled by computing technologies that have taken over to become the mechanisms of technical and aesthetic change. The conclusion reached by this thesis is that while cinema is undergoing massive changes these changes are evolutionary not revolutionary. Rather than constituting a paradigm shift in the Kuhnian sense into the new media it represents an extension and renegotiation of its technical and theoretical limits to both encompass and be encompassed by the new media. Cinema while being increasingly marginalised through these changes will remain a worthwhile object of study because its discourses and theoretical structures still have the power to comment meaningfully if not completely on the phenomena of new media like digital cinema.

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